UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/4
24 October 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Organizational session for 1996
6-9 February 1996

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Report of the twenty-ninth series of Joint Meetings of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, held on 16 October 1995

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) held the twenty-ninth series of Joint Meetings at United Nations Headquarters on 16 October 1995 under the chairmanship of Mr. Valeriu Tudor (Romania), Chairman of CPC.

2. The annotated provisional agenda for the Joint Meetings (E/1995/121) was adopted; it contained the following item: "Coordination of the activities of the United Nations system for the eradication of poverty".

3. The Joint Meetings had before them a background paper on the above-mentioned item (E/1995/120), prepared by the United Nations.

4. In his opening statement, the Chairman stressed the advantages of adopting an approach to coordination based on the proper division of labour among the organizations of the United Nations system, which would lead to greater cost efficiency and enhanced delivery of assistance. He noted that the coordination of activities in the fight against poverty presented a key challenge to the United Nations system.

5. The Chairman stated that poverty had been present since the dawn of civilization. The eradication of poverty required a long-term remedy that would empower people to meet their own needs. He drew attention to the background paper, which presented the eradication of poverty as a priority development objective of the United Nations system that was supported by the international community.

6. The Chairman noted, however, that as stated in the background paper, there was a long way to go before the United Nations system as a whole could be viewed as pursuing a truly coherent approach to the eradication of poverty. That poverty continued to claim victims was distressing evidence of the shortcomings in the coordination of United Nations activities. He therefore invited participants in the Joint Meetings, on the basis of a frank and candid exchange, to formulate conclusions and recommendations that would enable hundreds of millions of people to live in dignity and in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

7. The Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development stated that, while the eradication of poverty had been at the heart of the development agenda for many years, the present juncture was a particularly opportune one to systematically improve joint efforts to target poverty. The World Summit for Social Development had established national and international commitments to the eradication of poverty within a definite time-frame, and the formulation of national strategies would be carried out within the scope of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996).

8. He added that it was necessary for the work of the United Nations system to be integrated with that of Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil

society. The coordination of United Nations system activities for the eradication of poverty required three key elements:

(a) An articulation of the concept of poverty that was neither too broad nor too narrow;

(b) A common understanding of the goals to be achieved;

(c) Synergy at the field level.

9. Statements were made during the Joint Meetings by the representatives of the United Nations Development Programme, Germany, the United Nations Children's Fund, Egypt, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Netherlands, the United Nations Population Fund, the United States of America, the International Labour Organization, Canada, the World Bank, India, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, France, the World Food Programme, Benin, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Japan, China, Brazil, Senegal, Mexico, Cuba, Togo and Argentina; statements were also made by the observers for Spain (on behalf of the European Union) and Algeria.

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

10. The Joint Meetings decided that the results of the Meetings should be presented in the form of a Chairman's summary, which is reproduced below.

Discussion

On the basis of the comparative advantage of various organizations, the Joint Meetings focused on the promotion of system-wide coordination with a view to identifying gaps, overlaps or duplication and to maximizing the quality and quantity of assistance delivered to Governments in their efforts to eradicate poverty. It was considered that the framework in which substantive coordination and cooperative efforts of the United Nations system should take place had been defined by the outcome of recent international conferences; in particular, Commitment 2 (a) of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development had called for the formulation or strengthening of national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country.

The meeting was informed of the action taken by ACC at its second regular session of 1995 (12 and 13 October 1995) to establish inter-agency task forces for the integrated follow-up to recent global conferences. ACC members also informed the meeting of their activities and the mechanisms for coordination in the area of poverty, particularly as a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. They concurred that no organization could tackle alone the challenge of eradicating poverty, given its multisectoral character and the need to develop strategies that would cut

across the mandates of individual organizations. The proper division of labour among the organizations of the United Nations system was crucial for maximizing coordination and would require a recognition by all of the value of each organization's mandate.

ACC members considered that big strides had been taken by the United Nations system both within and among organizations in recent years. The eradication of poverty was at the heart of the mandates of most of the organizations of the system. The World Bank was actively pursuing the poverty eradication strategy that had been developed following its World Development Report 1990, and Bank lending for poverty eradication projects had continued to increase. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was developing strategies to mainstream poverty-related concerns into the advice and design of IMF-supported economic programmes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had allocated resources for a special fund to be used by resident coordinators in helping countries to develop time-bound strategies for the eradication of poverty, and had also committed 90 per cent of its core resources for assistance to countries with a per capita income of US$ 750 or less. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had taken important steps in the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, particularly in assisting in the development of over 100 national programmes of action. The 20/20 concept, as adopted by the World Summit for Social Development, was a useful tool for pursuing the goal of eradicating poverty. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) had increased delivery of assistance by 20 per cent and had reduced administrative costs by 18 per cent.

The Standing Committee on Poverty of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had attached growing importance to the nexus between poverty alleviation and international trade, and had elaborated a set of actions on trade and poverty in the light of the results of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. The question of the implications of globalization and liberalization for the least developed countries and other weaker economies would be addressed at the ninth session of UNCTAD, to be held in South Africa in April and May 1996. Taking the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development as a framework, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was addressing the eradication of poverty by providing focused assistance to a group of low-income countries and, within those countries, to disadvantaged groups both in rural and urban areas, with a special emphasis on women. The mandate of the World Food Programme (WFP) covered both relief and development: its coordination concerns extended over the entire relief/development continuum. It was at the emergency end of the continuum, where the priority was to save lives, that the foundations of future development work were often laid; however, in such extreme situations, the conditions for coordination were limited, because the circumstances made it difficult for other development agencies to operate and the preparation of new programmes required a certain amount of lead time.

The fight against poverty was one of the three priority objectives guiding the activity of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Central to the ILO approach to eradicating poverty was the design of policies and programmes to generate productive employment. While pursuing its Education for All activities designed to promote social development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had recently established the Management of Social Transformation Programme to act as a clearing-house on policies and strategies related to social integration, with special emphasis on combating social exclusion and marginalization. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was reinforcing its normative functions and policy advice capacity to assist countries in developing poverty eradication programmes, while strengthening its own work on enhancing food security and nutrition, in particular in low-income food-deficit countries; assisting in improving the access of the poor, notably rural women, to productive resources, especially land; and ensuring coordinated approaches to poverty-related programmes. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) was coordinating its activities with FAO, the ILO and the World Health Organization (WHO), among others, to provide assistance in promoting rural development, small and medium enterprises, and agro-industries, and in improving the availability of medical supplies and health services. UNIDO activities focused on Africa and the least developed countries. Special attention was being given to enhancing the integration of women in industrial development. The main constraint to UNIDO efforts remained the lack of adequate resources. UNDP and the World Bank had recently established high-level task forces on policy in aid coordination. UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank had also initiated collaboration on poverty measurements and monitoring. It was noted that the resident coordinator was a statutory member of the World Bank consultative groups.

A number of ACC members indicated that strategic linkages had also been built with international financial institutions and regional development banks.

One ACC member considered that, while continued efforts to establish a coordinated multisectoral approach to the eradication of poverty were indispensable, the cost of coordination would be excessive, if it resulted in numerous meetings and reporting requirements to numerous intergovernmental forums. A careful scrutiny should therefore be made of the value added by specific coordination mechanisms. The view was also expressed, however, that the purpose of coordination was to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness: it should therefore result in cost savings.

Several CPC members expressed concern at the late issuance of the background paper, a factor that had impeded their full consideration of the selected topic. While noting the positive progress that had been made, CPC members considered that more information was needed on the problems and shortcomings of the coordination of United Nations activities for the eradication of poverty. It was suggested that at future joint meetings ACC members provide appropriate information in advance, including diagrams relating to coordination instruments among them. It was also suggested that structural adjustment programmes should be taken into account in addressing the problems of poverty.

CPC members recalled the mandate that had been given to the Joint Meetings by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1988/64. In that resolution, the Council had decided that appropriate measures for effective intergovernmental and intersecretariat follow-up of the conclusions and recommendations of the Joint Meetings should be reported to it through CPC. In that regard, a number of CPC members questioned whether any value was added by the Joint Meetings, particularly in view of the strengthening of the role of the Council in coordination through its coordination segment. On the other hand, while many members, agreed that CPC was an important tool for monitoring and coordinating programme delivery, they considered that it was up to CPC and ACC members themselves to ensure the usefulness of the Joint Meetings. Several CPC members stressed the usefulness of devoting the Joint Meetings to the coordination of United Nations system activities for the eradication of poverty.

CPC members emphasized the overarching importance of the eradication of poverty: international commitment to that goal had been clearly expressed at the World Summit for Social Development. More information was required concerning the specific work of the United Nations system and the identification of gaps in its coordination. The current Joint Meetings should help ACC to identify the system-wide coordination issues that should be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council. There still appeared to be duplication in the work of the United Nations system on eradicating poverty, and there was a need to consolidate the work of individual organizations; the development of the country strategy note was a step in that direction. The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) would make an important contribution to international efforts for eradicating poverty.

The view was expressed that it was necessary to integrate the issue of the eradication of poverty within the context of people-centred sustainable development. The need for a joint programme on poverty was raised by one member.

Members of CPC raised a number of questions about the goals, scope of work, reporting arrangements and time-frames of the inter-agency task forces established by ACC. Some members questioned whether the cross-cutting themes covered by the task forces fully matched the outcomes of recent conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development; others considered that the establishment of the inter-agency task forces was only a beginning and needed to be further developed. Questions were also raised about actions taken by the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to reorient their programmes in response to the Summit.

In response, it was noted that the problem of poverty, while being country-specific, also raised a number of common issues across countries and regions as well as across sectors that called for coordination at the inter-agency level, such as the need for coherence and consistency between macroeconomic and social policies; the feminization of poverty; and the need to ensure the participation of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the formulation of poverty eradication programmes. The

inter-agency task forces, to be coordinated by lead agencies, were intended to provide operational guidance and support for inter-agency cooperation on such cross-sectoral issues at the field level so as to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of their assistance to developing countries. The task forces would function under the aegis of ACC and would have time-bound goals.

It was also stressed that there was a need to adopt a bottom-up approach that would involve all actors, including civil society and the private sector, and would ensure the participation of the poor in decision-making processes.

Conclusions

The following broad conclusions can be drawn from the discussion:

(a) The eradication of poverty has emerged as a top priority of the work of the United Nations system. This priority must be pursued in the coordinated follow-up to global conferences, in particular the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. Efforts to eradicate poverty should be based on individual countries' goals and plans. Therefore, the success of the coordination efforts of the United Nations system must be measured at the country level. The need for a supportive international environment to meet the challenge of eradicating poverty should be fully taken into account. There is a need to identify and assess practical measures for enhancing coordination within the United Nations system. It is also important to mobilize adequate resources and use them effectively and efficiently;

(b) It has been noted that ACC, at its second regular session of 1995 (12 and 13 October 1995), established three inter-agency task forces on subjects that are closely related to the eradication of poverty to follow up the cross-cutting themes of recent global conferences. The task forces cover:

(i) Basic social services for all (lead agency: World Bank);

(ii) Full employment and sustainable livelihoods for all (lead agency: ILO);

(iii) An enabling environment for people-centred sustainable development (lead agency: World Bank);

(c) The Joint Meetings are considering establishing an inter-agency task force oriented towards the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. A final decision will be taken following the consideration of that outcome by the General Assembly;

(d) It has been stressed by CPC and ACC members alike that effective coordination needs to be pursued and assessed at the country level in terms of its impact on the poor;

(e) The efforts of the United Nations system need to be integrated with those of Governments and non-governmental organizations at the community and national levels. The resident coordinator has a key role to play at the field level in the integrated follow-up to conferences, by organizing thematic working groups and ensuring that task forces and specific programmes are field-driven;

(f) It has been agreed that close linkages should be established between the multisectoral strategies being pursued by various organizations, and that the instruments of coordination available at the country level should be used to the fullest extent to enhance the effectiveness and impact of anti-poverty programmes.